

Claims 5-8 stand objected to under 37 CFR 1.75(c) as being in improper form because they involve two levels of multi-dependency. This issue has been corrected by making all multi-dependent claims in the application single-dependent.

Claims 9 and 10 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph as being incomplete. The Examiner found that the elements "intermediate member" and "retaining member" recited in claim 9 are disclosed in claim 2 on which claim 9 depends, but are not disclosed in claim 1, on which claim 9 also depends. This issue has been removed by canceling claim 1 and changing the dependency of claim 9 accordingly.

Claims 9 and 10 stand further rejected under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite. To address the deficiency in claim 9, applicants have changed the expression "at least one retaining element" to "the at least one retaining element". The lack of antecedent basis for "the intermediate element" in claim 10 (due to claim 9 depending on claim 1) is of no further concern after claim 1 has been canceled.

Based on the foregoing amendments and remarks, applicants respectfully request the Examiner to withdraw all claim objections as well as the rejections under 35 U.S.C. 112.

Additional voluntary amendments in the claims are of a strictly editorial nature to bring the claims into conformance with proper claims language. For example, the expression "characterized in that" was replaced with "wherein", and instances where features were claimed in the alternative have been corrected.

No new matter is introduced by any of the amendments to the claims and the specification that are presented herein.

Applicants note with appreciation that the Examiner has allowed claim 2, which forms the independent main claim of the present application. As a consequence of claim 2 being allowed, applicants respectfully submit that claims 3-10 should be allowed because they depend on an allowable main claim and that the remaining claims rejections under 35 USC §102 and § 103 are therefore a moot issue.

In view of the above, each of the presently pending claims in this application is believed to be in condition for immediate allowance. Accordingly, the Examiner is respectfully requested to pass this application to issue.

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Respectfully submitted,

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Attachments:

- Amended Abstract of the Disclosure
- Petition for one-month extension of time with requisite fee
- copy of DE 196 37 001 A1 with an English language Abstract

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